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ABSTRACT

English for native speakers is compared and contrasted with English for non-native speakers by examining the influence of Moffett's (1968) structural curriculum for native speakers and the notional functional syllabus approach for second language learners. Both approaches are more rhetorical and less grammatical then the approaches that preceded them. The structural curriculum posits that the fundamental structure of discourse is a set of relations between sender, receiver, and message. In the notional functional syllabus, the learning units are not situations but semantic or notional categories such as time; space; and the sentential case relations of agent, initiator, and object. Structural curriculum strives to mirror the psychological growth of the learner while notional-functional syllabi do not. The former approach also attempts to provide general linguistic skills (usually for children) while the latter works best with adults whose language needs can be precisely determined. It is concluded that teachers of both native speakers and of second language speakers can benefit from using certain aspects of the two methodologies. The structural curriculum approach can readily be applied to teaching the kind of communicative competence English as a second language progjrams strive for. Notional functional syllabi seem best suited to assist in the teaching of native speakers by integrating the study of grammar and the study of writing. (RW)

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# MOFFETT'S STRUCTURAL CURRICULUM AND THE NOTIONAL-FUNCTIONAL SYLLABUS

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*Practitioners of the two Englishes -- English for native speakers and ESL -- are beginning to agree on many practical and theoretical issues. To demonstrate this agreement, two influential programs -- James Moffett's structural curriculum for native speakers and the notional-functional syllabus for second language learners -- are compared and contrasted. The article concludes by pointing out benefits to be derived from coalescing the two Englishes.*

This paper will examine the two Englishes -- English for native speakers and English for non-native speakers -- by comparing and contrasting two influential movements within each field: James Moffett's structural curriculum and the notional-

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functional syllabus.[1]

I do not claim that either movement is new. Both have been around for some time: Moffett introduced his curriculum in the late 60's; work on the notional-functional syllabus began in the early 70's. I do claim, however, that both movements continue to excite teachers and scholars in the two Englishes. Moffett's work has proven particularly durable.[2] The topics Moffett began writing about in the 60's still fascinate researchers in the 80's: ways of classifying discourse, Vygotsky's concept of inner speech and its relation to writing, and the changes that occur in children's discourse as they move from conversation to composition. His work continues to be disseminated widely through the very successful Bay Area Writing Project.

I also claim that while neither movement is new they exhibit something which is new: namely, a rather remarkable agreement concerning both theory and practice between people in the two Englishes. A word about this agreement before I discuss Moffett's curriculum and the notional-functional syllabus.

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[1] In British usage syllabus roughly corresponds to curriculum. American descriptions of a curriculum, however, usually include lengthier comments on methodology and educational philosophy. A British syllabus is sometimes simply a list of learning units to be covered with only a bare minimum of explanation.

[2] His first book, Teaching the Universe of Discourse (1968), remains the best introduction to the theories on which his curriculum is based. Student-Centered Language Arts and Reading, K-13 (1976), a handbook which he co-authored with Betty Jane Wagner, contains many practical suggestions as well as theoretical explanations. (For convenience I refer throughout this paper to "Moffett's curriculum" although "Moffett and Wagner's curriculum" would perhaps be more accurate since many important issues are covered most completely in this handbook. Moffett was also senior editor for Interaction (1973), a package of language activities including communication games and activities on cards and cassette tapes and an anthology of literature arranged according to his theory of discourse (see below). His recent works include Active Voice: A Writing Program across the Curriculum (1981) and Coming on Center: English Education in Evolution (1981).

Why the Two Englishes Are Coming Together

The two Englishes are merging in part because both have responded to the disintegration of a paradigm that had influenced theory and practice for some years. In the 1960's researchers and teachers in both disciplines began to abandon an old paradigm which stressed the forms of language in order to embrace a new paradigm stressing communicative function. In composition instruction this shift involved a movement from arhetorical approaches stressing correctness and the modes of discourse -- narration, description, exposition, and persuasion -- to rhetorical approaches stressing audience sensitivity, the aims of discourse, and the process rather than the product of writing. In ESL the shift occurred when teachers and researchers began to replace the audio-lingual method and its structural pattern drills with more situational approaches designed to instill communicative as well as grammatical competence.

The two Englishes have also been brought together by current research in second language acquisition, particularly error analysis and morpheme acquisition studies such as those done by Dulay and Burt (1974). This research revealed that many errors non-native speakers make in learning English are of the same type that native speakers make; in other words, a large percentage are developmental not interference errors. It also revealed that the order in which non-native speakers acquired certain grammatical morphemes was very similar to the order in which native speakers acquired them. Thus researchers have concluded that since first and second languages are acquired in the same way, or in almost the same way, it makes sense to teach them the same way. Such reasoning has helped to bring the two Englishes together.

The varied language backgrounds of our students have also contributed to this convergence. The presence in our classroom of large numbers of students who are neither monolingual English or Spanish (or Vietnamese, or Laotian, etc.) speakers nor balanced bilinguals but who fall at various points on a continuum between these two poles has rendered the old labels -- native speaker and non-native speaker -- less useful. Classroom teachers encountering this linguistically diverse population of students have reasoned that if English for their students is sort of a native language and sort of a second language, then it makes sense to use approaches which draw on the two Englishes.

Essau and Keene (1981) in a recent article in College English suggest another reason why people in the two Englishes seem to be talking about the same theories and recommending similar instructional techniques. This has occurred, Essau and Kenne argue, because learning how to speak another language is similar to learning how to write one's own. Thus a second language teaching-learning model nicely illuminates some aspects of the composing process of people writing their

native language. Krashen's monitor model, for example his distinction between acquisition and learning, can be applied to writing (1978). According to Krashen, the crucial abilities needed to speak another language are unconsciously acquired not consciously learned. Esau and Keene argue that similarly the crucial aspects of writing, namely invention and composing, are best acquired unconsciously, when the monitor is turned off. Revising/editing, however, can be consciously learned while the monitor is on.

Esau and Keene find other parallels between the two Englishes. They relate, for example, Selinker's (1972) concept of interlanguage and Linda Flower's concept of writer and reader based prose. Flower's research, they argue, suggests that students' writing can be considered "a series of interlanguage systems . . . intermediate between writer and reader-based prose" (1981:701). They also compare the shift in ESL from grammar based to situation-based syllabi to the shift in composition from linear approaches that proceeded from word through sentence and paragraph to essay to newer approaches that attempt to acknowledge the looping or recursive nature of the composing process.

## Moffett's Structural Curriculum

Moffett's structural curriculum and the notional-functional syllabus, which both deemphasize explicit instruction in grammatical structure, are particular manifestations of these general trends I have mentioned. Both programs are more rhetorical and less grammatical than the approaches that preceded them. For Moffett the fundamental structure of the language arts is a set of relations between sender, receiver, and message (1968:10). Types of discourse, he says, can be arranged along two continuums based on these relations. One can consider the sender-receiver of I-You relation and classify discourse types based on the amount of physical and psychological distance that typically exists between sender and receiver. Thus for interior monologues, dialogues, and friendly letters the distance is non-existent or very small; but for essays and scientific writing, which are addressed to more universal audiences, the sender-receiver gap is great. Or one can consider the I-It relation and classify discourses by degree of abstraction, yielding discourses that simply record what is happening at one end of the continuum and essays that generalize and theorize about things and events at the other. In designing his curriculum Moffett collapses these two continuums -- the I-You or rhetorical and the I-It or logical -- into one and arranges discourse types along it (1968:47). These discourse types become Moffett's curricular objectives. When children finish with his curriculum, he says, they should be able to send and receive in both modes -- speaking and writing

-- all these discourse types.[3] The continuum, corresponds to a "developmental sequence of growth": young children are comfortable dialoguing about the here and now with friends but must mature cognitively before they can compose an abstract monologue for a distant audience (Moffett and Wagner, 1976: 25).

## The Notional-Functional Syllabus

The notional-functional syllabus is best explained by contrasting it with grammatical and situational syllabi. The learning units of a grammatical syllabus are grammatical forms -- the demonstrative pronouns, definite and indefinite articles, present and past tenses, and so forth. These grammatical items are arranged according to various principles -- contrastive difficulty in comparison to the students' own language, frequency of use, or regularity within the system of the target language (Wilkins, 1976: 6). The main objection to the grammatical syllabus has been that students learn the forms but don't know which forms are appropriate in particular situations. The learning units of a situational syllabus, on the other hand, are simulated real life encounters which are usually given such labels as "Asking the Way" or "At the Post Office" and so forth. Students are taught the grammatical forms that would be used to perform in these situations. Situational syllabi have been criticized for being based on the false assumption that certain situations dictate the use of particular grammatical expressions when in fact one can go, say, to the post office to ask for change, complain about the slowness of the mails, or do a host of things besides buy stamps or mail a package (Wilkins, 1976: 17).

The learning units of a notional-functional syllabus are neither grammatical structures nor situations but semantic, or notional, categories such as time, space, and the sentential case relations of agent, initiator, object, initiator, object, beneficiary, and instrument. Proponents of the notional-functional syllabus maintain that by making the notion of time, for example, an essential unit rather than verb tense forms,

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[3] In the handbook (Moffett and Wagner, 1976: 24) the following nine discourse types are listed: 1. Word Play (riddles, puns, tongue twisters, much poetry); 2. Labels and Captions (language joined with pictures or objects, graphs, maps, and so on); 3. Invented Dialogue (improvisation and scripts); 4. Actual Dialogue (discussion and transcripts); 5. Invented Stories (fiction, fables, tales, much poetry, and so on); 6. True Stories (autobiography, memoir, biography, reportage, journals, and so on); 7. Directions (for how to do and how to make); 8. Information (generalized fact); 9. Ideas (generalized thought).

one can show learners that the same notion -- future time, for example -- can be expressed through a variety of forms: by a modal auxiliary (He will leave), by the present progressive of the verb to go plus the infinitive (He is going to leave), by the present simple tense (He leaves tomorrow), and so forth. In other words, the syllabus accounts for the fact that a single form does not stand in a one-to-one relationship with a grammatical meaning (Wilkins, 1976: 56).

The other category of learning units in a notional-functional syllabus -- the functions -- are the things that we do with language. Syllabus designers arrive at these through introspection, not through any scientific procedures, and the lists vary: Wilkins lists judgement, suasion, argument, concession, rational enquiry and exposition, and personal emotion (1976: 44-45); van Ek lists imparting and seeking factual information, expressing and finding out intellectual attitudes, expressing and finding out emotional attitudes, expressing and finding out moral attitudes, getting things done, and socializing (1976: 25).

## The Two Approaches Compared and Contrasted

In some ways Moffett's structural curriculum and the notional-functional syllabus are remarkably similar. Both emphasize a broad communicative competence not a narrow grammatical one, both are based on the assumption that emphasizing the uses of language will increase students' motivation to learn, and both reveal a strong faith in the ability of learners to sort out the parts of language for themselves if presented with the larger wholes. Moffett is very adamant about this last point. He is opposed, for example, to formal grammar study, ascribing to what is sometimes called the linguistic osmosis theory. According to this theory students will learn grammatical structures unconsciously and naturally as a result of being challenged to communicate in different rhetorical situations. It's not necessary, Moffett believes, to "rig," as he puts it, separate teaching units on grammar. Students will pick up the subskills of sentence construction and elaboration as a result of trying to solve communication problems (Moffett and Wagner, 1976: 458). Like Stephen Krashen, Moffett believes that all the important language abilities are unconsciously acquired not consciously learned. And like Krashen he believes that acquisition occurs best when language users focus on the message and not on the form.

Advocates of the notional-functional syllabus don't place quite as much faith in linguistic osmosis as Moffett and Krashen. Wilkins and van Ek, for example, suggest that though the learning units that give shape to the syllabus are not grammatical forms, teachers may wish to isolate some grammatical forms for special instruction. But advocates of the notional-functional syllabus are willing to live with the fact that the

items presented in any one unit will be "linguistically heterogeneous"' they recognize that the syllabus does not "provide an ordered exposure to the grammar of the language" (Wilkins, 1976: 19).

Although there are these similarities between Moffett's structural curriculum and the notional-functional syllabus, there are some important differences. First, in Moffett's curriculum the progression is, as I mentioned, intended to conform to the psychological growth of the child. The types of discourses at the beginning of his continuum -- the dialogues and stories -- are the ones that speakers and writers not fully decentered from childhood egocentrism and concrete thought could be expected to perform; discourse types at the end of the curriculum demand skills in abstract reasoning that young children are still developing. Notional-functional syllabi, on the other hand, are not designed to mirror the psychological growth of learners. The principle of progression usually recommended is from forms that are not strongly marked for politeness or extreme formality or informality to the more marked forms. Thus in learning to seek permission the student would learn Can I use your telephone? before Would you be so kind as to let me use your telephone? Wilkins suggests that the syllabus be cyclically organized: the learner would proceed through the different functions learning the stylistically neutral forms for expressing the functions on the first cycle, then the more marked forms on later cycles. Learners who complete the course would possess, Wilkins says, "an impressive rhetorical range" (1976: 61).

A second difference has to do with the degree of explicitness in the defining of objectives. Moffett's curriculum is designed to provide children with general linguistic skills that will prove useful to them whatever their language needs are in later life. Notional-functional syllabi, however, most everyone agrees, work best with adults whose language needs can be rather precisely determined. Much of the work on notional-functional syllabi has been done under Council of Europe auspices, the aim being to establish a European credit/unit system for modern language learning by adults. As linguists working for the Council have explained, they set out "to break down the global concept of language into units and sub-units based on an analysis of particular groups of adult learners, in terms of the communication situations in which they are characteristically involved" (Trim, Richterich, van Ek, and Wilkins, 1980: 9). In other words, the aim was to specify the English notions and functions that, say, a French secretary in Paris needs to acquire to be certified as a secretary capable of handling correspondence in English. Advocates of notional-functional syllabi believe that by concentrating only on the crucial notions and functions they can get people to operate linguistically very quickly in their assigned roles.

Careful specification of behavioral objectives is anathema

to Moffett. He insists that objectives should never be stated any more specifically than he states them -- the ability to send and receive his nine discourse types (Moffett and Wagner, 1976: 409). By making these discourse types also his list of curriculum objectives he hopes to prevent the particle approach to language arts instruction. Excessively specific objectives, Moffett argues, dictate to teachers how they should teach and make it impossible to adjust teaching methods to fit the individual needs of students. Keeping the objectives general allows teachers to adopt different means to achieve the same ends.

This matter of degree of specification of objectives is closely related to another key difference between Moffett's structural curriculum and the notional-functional syllabus: Moffett insists that the only "language unit worthy of being made a learning unit" is a whole, authentic discourse (Moffett and Wagner, 1976: 12). Some of Moffett's nine discourse types are short -- riddles and captions, for example -- but they are all authentic discourses that exist in the culture. According to Moffett, learning units must be whole discourses for two reasons: first, because context governs text, that is because decisions concerning the lower levels of word and clause and sentence cannot be made in a rhetorical vacuum -- one has to know who is writing to whom and for what purpose; and second, because whole discourses are more motivating than smaller units (Moffett and Wagner, 1976: 17).

Although advocates of the notional-functional syllabus claim it is more motivating than a structural syllabus, it clearly doesn't motivate by concentrating on whole discourses. The communicative functions of the notional-functional syllabus, which are the learning units which most closely resemble actual discourse units, usually appear in notional-functional syllabi as single sentences. Seeking permission, for example, may be exhibited by Can I use your telephone? and other stylistic variants each one sentence long.[4] Advocates of notional-functional syllabi may maintain that this is simply for convenience, that in actual discourse a function may be expressed in several sentences. They may also acknowledge that one function may be contained within another; for example, one might impart information as a way of seeking permission (Wilkins, 1976: 49). But despite their disclaimer, the way functions are presented in notional-functional syllabi encourages a rather narrow sentence-based approach. While Moffett wants to

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[4]Syllabus designers state the functions in this way, I think, because they have been strongly influenced by speech act theorists, another group of language scholars very interested in what people use language to do. Speech act theorists claim that "characteristic form of an elocutionary act an act like promising, requesting, telling, etc. is a complete sentence" (Searle, 1969: 25).

give students control of a series of texts ranging from dialogue to monologue, the notional-functional syllabus designers give the impression that they would be content if students could create dialogues using single sentence units.

In summary, as Widdowson, a constructive critic of notional-functional syllabi, points out, the learning units of such syllabi are "isolates." They are "notional rather than structural isolates, but they are isolates all the same." The syllabus is "an inventory of units for accumulation and storage" and "derives from an analyst's and not a participant's view of language"; it is not composed of authentic discourses. For these reasons, the notional-functional syllabus cannot teach communicative competence because "communicative competence is not a compilation of items in memory but a set of strategies or creative procedures for realizing the value of linguistic items in contexts of use" (Widdowson, 1978: 35).

So what is the answer for the two Englishes? If we accept Moffett's proposal for native speakers and Widdowson's criticism of notional-functional approaches for non-native speakers we seem left with Roger Brown's advice to mothers concerned about their children's linguistic growth: "If you concentrate on communicating, everything else will follow" (Quoted by Krashen, 1978: 19). Is this the answer -- for native speakers, for non-native speakers? There's evidence that suggests it may be. Regarding native speakers, the failure of any experiment to prove that the study of formal grammar leads to improvement in writing suggests that concentration on the structures doesn't work. And probably most writing teachers can attest that assignments like "Write a paragraph using comparison and contrast as the method of exposition," assignments that instruct students to produce substructures, not whole discourses, result in some bad writing and often impair student motivation. In ESL the success of bilingual immersion programs in Canada and elsewhere provide additional evidence that unconscious acquisition rather than conscious attention to language form is the key to successful second language learning.

Arrayed against this evidence for the efficacy of focusing on communication and letting the parts take care of themselves, however, is the experience of many teachers that some students simply cannot master language skills through linguistic osmosis. Mina Shaughnessy (1977) and Sarah D'Eloia (1977), who have worked with basic writers at the City University of New York, have found that their students require explicit instruction in grammar before they can improve their writing. (Grammar study won't be effective, however, D'Eloia points out, if the transfer to writing is assumed to occur automatically; it must be carefully mediated.) The undeniable success of sentence combining, too, suggests that getting students to attend to language structures can improve their writing.

We should be wary, too, of exaggerating the differences between those who believe work with whole authentic discourses

is sufficient and those who insist on drilling the structures. Both Moffett and Krashen believe the grammar forms should be taught; they differ from the structuralists only in how they should be taught. Moffett and Krashen believe that the best way for students to acquire grammar forms is to pick them up as a by-product of their attempts to communicate effectively. But neither Moffett nor Krashen want to leave this acquisition completely to chance. Moffett believes that by controlling the intake teachers can teach grammar structures without drawing the students' attention to them. In dialoguing with students, for example, teachers can ask the kinds of questions that students will find difficult to answer unless they subordinate, nominalize or embed structures (Moffett, 1968: 78-83). Krashen, who opposes free conversation and uncontrolled teacher monologues in the ESL class, wants to control classroom activities so that they provide the proper intake, and he lists some characteristics that intake must have; for example, it should be at, or slightly in advance of, the learner's current grammatical competence (1978: 17).

In conclusion, I think we should reap some practical returns from the fact that there is considerable theoretical agreement these days between practitioners of the two Englishes. Moffett and Wagner's handbook and the Interaction series of games and activities that accompanies it contain some excellent communication activities that work well in ESL classes. They work because they are designed to teach the same kind of communicative competence that many ESL teachers want to teach; in other words, the focus is not on how to monitor to achieve perfectly correct speech or writing but rather on how to communicate effectively using whatever means are at one's disposal. Some of the activities recommended, show and tell, for example, and back to back (instructing a partner on how to arrange items on a board while sitting back to back), may not be new to ESL teachers, but it's nice to have so many suggestions packed conveniently into one volume.

Notional-functional syllabi and the closely related communicative grammars (see, for example, Leech and Svartvik, 1975) may be able to assist those of us who teach native speakers and wish to integrate the study of grammar and the study of writing. The notional-functional syllabus is a response to the realization that different forms can be used to perform the same function, but that each form conveys a slightly different interpersonal, or stylistic, meaning. Can I use your telephone? and Would you be so kind as to let me use your telephone? are both requests for permission but one is more formally polite than the other. Improving one's writing style involves learning to make the same kind of distinction. As Strunk and White (1972: 60) point out, it involves being able to decide, as Thomas Paine did, that These are the times that try men's souls is superior -- at least for the purpose Paine intended -- to other possible variants: Times like these try men's

souls. Soulwise, these are trying times. Gradually one learns different ways of phrasing the same content and how to choose the variant which is appropriate for the linguistic and extra linguistic context. Using the insights of the notional-functional syllabi designers we may be able to convince our students that they already possess a variety of speaking styles; if convinced of that, they may then be more ready to learn a variety of writing styles.

Obviously no one would argue that we should always use the same methods to teach children who are monolingual speakers of English and children who are at different stages of bilingualism. Students in each group (and individuals within the groups) have their own strengths and weaknesses that require special attention. But some approaches will work for both groups. And, most importantly, because researchers and teachers in both Englishes are doing exciting work, people in both fields can learn a lot from each other.

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